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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/RSP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD -
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

A) "The Actual Situation Regarding the Timeline for [Taiwan's] New Constitution and an Evaluation of Its External Effects"

The centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" observed in its editorial (12/1):

". We don't know if President Chen's clarification [regarding his plan to hold a referendum on a new constitution in 2006] can really eliminate Washington's worry that Taiwan will have a new constitution in the next few years. But from [State Department Spokesman] Richard Boucher's remarks [Monday] . and the previous statement by a U.S. official that the status quo of the Taiwan Strait should be defined by the United States, [it is evident that] the United States cannot be rid of its doubts about Taiwan's intention to unilaterally change the status quo just because Chen argues that it agrees with Taiwan's constitutional procedures to hold a referendum on the new constitution. Or to borrow Chen's words, what the United States cares about is not the argument about whether it is constitutional to hold such a referendum but whether the unilateral move by Taiwan will cause substantive changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, a development that would give Beijing an excuse to adopt radical actions to force the United States to get involved in the unpredictable disputes across the Taiwan Strait."

"Objectively speaking, Washington's doubts are reasonable because its intention is try to prevent anything from happening between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. But since the United States is reacting like this, it is expected that Beijing will react more strongly in the regular press briefing by China's Taiwan Affairs Office today. President Chen's remarks, judged from Beijing's perspective, have actually proved his consistent position from de jure Taiwan independence to substantive Taiwan independence. Especially in the face of such a timetable for ... the new constitution, Beijing may be forced, in response, to talk about the timeline for reunification or even upgrading its military readiness to use force to stop Taiwan from moving toward independence."

B) "Chen Shui-bian Is Exhausting the U.S. Trust in Him"

Journalist Chang Hui-ying wrote in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" (12/1):

". No one will trust the positive comments you make if you have gone back on your word too many times. Only the negative ones will be heard. The consequences will be the using up of one's credibility and the disqualification of one's privilege to make good-will promises. It is because any good-will gesture will not be trusted. As a result, there will be no space for policy [flexibility], and one [Chen] has to live on extremist remarks."

"The United States has obviously shortened significantly the `time span of its trust' toward Taiwan. In the past, Chen Shui-bian would have to have overstepped the bounds several times before the United States noticed. But now every step or move by him is closely watched all the time. Whenever he says something, he is asked to explain. There is no time lag to play with. However, at least for the time being, Chen Shui-bian has not been intimidated by the United States. After all, there is still the ... lag between U.S. pressure and Taiwan's elections."

C) "It Is Not in the United States' Interests to Strike Taiwan in Order to Pacify China"

A commentary by Tsou Jiin-wen in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" said (12/1):

"The U.S. Department of State is speaking again. The tone being heard this time by the people of Taiwan is entirely different from the feeling they had before the

U.S. general elections. Before the elections, the Taiwan people were more understanding toward the offending but honest comments made by the superpower ally. But after President Bush's re-election, many Taiwan people would like to say: please, my old friend, don't treat Taiwan's dignity as if it were nothing.

"Taiwan is already a completely democratic nation. Its people are absolutely entitled to decide what is a modern constitution that meets the demands of the time. They also have the wisdom to calculate and bear the consequences of their choices. There is no need for a foreign spokesperson to openly call on Taiwan's head of state by name and ask him to provide an explanation."

"There is no room for dictatorship in Taiwan anymore. Even if a president has promised something by himself, the promise does not mean anything unless the people of Taiwan approve it."

". [If the United States treats Taiwan] using selective democratic standards and conditional justice, it is not impossible that the advocacy for a peaceful takeover by China will win the upper hand when Taiwan is pushed into a corner. By that time where will the U.S. interest lie? ."

D) "Chen Is Required by U.S. to Clarify Referendum Talk"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" editorialized (12/1):

"President Chen Shui-bian's credibility was questioned once again yesterday by Washington when a State Department spokesman demanded that the Taipei leader clarified (sic) his recent remarks about his intention to hold a referendum on a new Constitution for Taiwan in 2006. .

"Here in Taipei, Chen was quick to deny that his latest take about holding a referendum to decide a new Constitution in 2006 has violated his past promises. But the fact is that Chen indeed contradicted the remarks he had made in May this year when he assumed office to begin his second term."

"In that inaugural speech, Chen explicitly pledged that his constitutional 're-engineering' project would be achieved in accordance with the 'existing constitutional procedures.' That is, the reform project would be first passed by the Legislature and then ratified by an ad hoc National Assembly. Beyond that, he didn't say anything about conducting a popular vote in 2006 to adopt a new Constitution. .

"Chen must have anticipated that his remarks could provoke Washington and Beijing, earning him charges of breaking his important political promises. But obviously he must also have calculated that at this point in time nothing counts more than the need for him to win a stable majority in the Legislature in next week's elections."

"It's really unfortunate that we should have a leader who would not hesitate to do anything for the good of his and his party's political interests even if this would mean jeopardizing the security of Taiwan and its people."

PAAL